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# ACCENT

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Gertrude Stein

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ACCENT: University Station, Urbana, Illinois. Published quarterly under the auspices of the Department of English of the University of Illinois. Subscriptions: $1.50 for one year, $2.50 for two years in the United States (elsewhere $1.75 for one year, $2.75 for two years). Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes. Entered as second-class matter Sept. 26, 1940, at the post office at Urbana, Illinois, under the act of March 3, 1879.


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ACCENT
A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE
Volume XVIII, Number 4 Autumn, 1958

# FRANK HOLWERDA:

## In a Tropical Minor Key

The hotel was built for some thirty guests—ghost-guests, it turned out. Because twenty-nine of the lattice-near-the-ceiling rooms had been locked now for years, window shutters dogged down, interiors fetidly hot, dark, smelling of South American must. The ugly frame building, a cube, stood off the ground on massive brownhart uprights so that air, even searingly hot, could find means to drift. The heavy planks and outside cedar laps swelled and groaned during the rainy season and dried and shrank again and shrivelled and cracked when the equatorial rains stopped and the powdery shell-dust from the street sifted in. The rank Guiana bush, a quarter of a mile away, might, now and then, send an emissary in the form of a bat or an awari-with-young for an after-dark visit. But guests who could reach in their pockets and pay never seemed to materialize. The help tip-toed about, endlessly dusting, drowsily waiting behind potted palms, speaking in whispers.

A squad of high stools stood at attention in front of the bar on the first floor, one of them well used, bottom rungs scuffed. The tall, heat-

thinned man, bony-cheeked and with eyes sunk deep in their sockets, leaned across the shiny slab of amaranth and idly watched the bartender scour the sink with fine white sand and a lime peel. He pushed his glass across the bar, then crooked an index finger and squeegeed the sweat from his forehead. "Better let me have another, Wek," he said.

"Same, Mr. Brenn?"

"One more and I'll go eat. What's for dinner tonight, Wek? Saturday night there should be . . ."

Wek poured the drink. "I'll go ask the cook," he said. He wiped his hands on his apron and his forehead on his sleeve and walked through the back door to the kitchen.

Geoffrey Brenn watched him go, drumming his fingers on the bar. He skidded his forefinger back and forth where his glass had left some moisture and swore. He stretched his long legs and pulled up the crease in his white linen pants. He was sweating behind the knees. He took a damp handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his temple with a corner. Wek came back through the door behind the bar. "There's chicken soup, red snapper, curried rice with chicken and cocoanut. Sugar pines for dessert—sliced." Wek made a simple, tired announcement of it. "Cook says it's chicken but it's really iguana—in the soup too. I saw the skin." He picked up the blackened lime peel and went back to the sink. He squeezed the lime peel into a mere button, dipped it in a saucer of sand and took long strokes with it across the drain of the sink.

"Saturday night blueplate! Hot curried rice and lizard is swell stuff in this heat, isn't it, Wek?" Jeff's voice carried sharply through the open door behind the bar. "Isn't it, Wek? Give me an answer—loud!"

"It's pretty good," Wek said without looking up. "I don't want to . . ."

"We have a bygod fire-stoker back there for a cook!" Jeff said. He had turned on his stool and spoke to the tiny polished dance floor and the empty chairs in the dining room beyond. "Wonder if that Borgian bastard ever heard of a cold salad? You know what lettuce is, Wek? Ever have it?" Wek paid no attention to him, the sweat dripping from the tip of his heavy nose as he worked.

And then in the sudden silence that followed, the heat billowed back. As though the sound of their voices had held it off, now that they were silent, it returned like a sudden hot blush.

A slight movement on the floor caught Jeff's eye. It was a mouse. He watched it dart around the potted palms and mahogany pillars, run along the base of the wall and bump into the mopboard below the bar. "Hey, Wek!" The sound of the whisper backed up the heat. "That mouse is here again! Wants a peanut! Funny thing, Wek, all I have to do is sit here a little while and he comes around. Knows me, Wek! The little grey bastard's a friend of mine. Follows me, Wek! For peanuts! Look!"

"Oh never mind the hint, Mr. Brenn," Wek said wearily, "I always serve the peanuts after your fourth drink. You won't eat them before that anyway." He slid the round basket across the bar and wiped his face on his sleeve again. "They're not my peanuts you know. And I don't really care when you eat them and how many either." He cut a fresh lime then turned and said "Sir."

"Now watch me feed my little grey friend a peanut, Wek," Jeff said. He dropped the shells on the bar and threw the kernel on the floor. The mouse nibbled it eagerly.

"That's all right, Mr. Brenn," Wek said patiently. "Throw 'em all down there. One of the boys'll sweep 'em up."

"You don't believe there's a mouse down here, do you, Wek?"

"No I don't, Mr. Brenn," Wek said politely. "I know when there's mice around. I can smell 'em."

"Take a look then."

"Can't see through the bar," Wek said. "Eyes not as good as they used to be."

"Neither's your nose! Lean over the bar then and take a look."

"Get dizzy when I lean over that far, Mr. Brenn. And I'm not supposed to leave the bar and walk out there either."

"Honestly, you just don't believe there's a mouse out here, do you, Wek?"

"No I don't think there's a mouse out there, Mr. Brenn. Sorry."

"It's not important," Jeff said. "The hell with it. And with everything else too!"

Wek said quietly, "I don't want to argue. But I still remember that time when . . ."

"OK, Wek. So you got a good memory! *Okay!*"

They stopped talking and with the silence the lid came off the giant stew-pot somewhere below, the moist heat rushing back as though filling a vacuum. It was still and quiet and as he sat thinking, Jeff wondered if either of them had spoken at all or if he'd just imag-

ined they had, or if there really was a mouse on the floor or not. He avoided looking down.

Jeff stretched his arms and tried for a yawn that wasn't there. "Wek," he said. "Saturday night, Wek. Does she ever . . ."

"Sir?"

"Never mind. Skip it." He began flipping peanut shells at the sink, aiming and sighting carefully. "When's the next tourist boat come in, Wek?"

"About three weeks." Wek left the sink, picked up a bar rag and wiped the spotless bar vigorously. He kept his eyes down and wiped back and forth. "You could take it easy tonight, Mr. Brenn? You could have an early dinner and go upstairs to bed? Get a good night's sleep and then . . ."

"The longer I sleep, the more nightmares I have, Wek. Another one, please. Same."

"Just let me ask you one question for a simple answer, Mr. Brenn. Just one." Wek pushed the filled glass across the bar. "Do you have to get that way every night?"

"Don't have to, Wek, but it sure helps." Jeff ran a pocket comb through his damp hair. He placed a cigarette between his lips and watched the sweat-soaked match heads crumble as he struck them. Wek leaned over with a light in his cupped hand. "If I cut this out," Jeff said, "you'd be out of a job. Ever think of that, Wek? I'm just about your only customer."

"I'll find something else," Wek said.

"You'll cut cane for seventeen Dutch Guiana cents an hour and eat fish heads and iguana eggs. You'd like that, wouldn't you? You like pow-pow made of palm worms, Wek? And you can put some goddamn curry on 'em if they taste a little muddy. First you let 'em horse around in a pan of warm milk for a day or so. Keep it shallow so they won't drown and then . . . "

"I don't want to argue," Wek said.

"All right! So the next tourist boat comes in, I'll find a nice girl and wine her lopsided and marry her and live in a house and never touch another drop and you can go cut cane. And use a dull machete, Wek. More fun that way!"

"Tourists!" Wek said. "You wine 'em all right! Never even go near your office when there's a boat in. Your company back in the States is going to . . . "

"My company!" Jeff said and crossed himself. "They don't need

me in that hot little office, Wek. I trained all of them not to need me. You should see all the money we make. I taught them to scoop it into a big pile before we send it to New York. I'm a good teacher, Wek. I should start a money school some place. I'd be the principal scooper!"

"You taught 'em too well, Mr. Brenn." Wek cut another lime in two and licked the juicy ends before going to the sink with it. "Tourists!" he said. "Huh! You want to hear what they say about this place?"

"God no! Spare me, Wek. I've heard."

"Utterly romantic," Wek said. "So *quaint!* And charming, utterly charming!" He dropped one of the lime halves, half stooped to retrieve it, then straightened and kicked it through the open back door. "You wine 'em all right, Mr. Brenn! And then they go back to the boat all primed and you come back here alone and sit here and argue with me."

"I won't do it anymore. Argue, I mean."

"Get yourself a nice girl from here, Mr. Brenn. From town here. Some of them are real nice. Honest! I could . . . "

Jeff stopped him with a wave of his hand. He stared at his hand held aloft as though it were not a part of himself. He lowered it and examined it carefully. "Local girls, Wek," he said thickly, "they're all sick! If they haven't got biggee-footoo, they got biggee-something-else! Biggee-fingeree or sickee-leggee! I don't know what all they got that's biggee. They sickee-biggee-leggee-missee!"

"Some of them got things wrong," Wek said. "Sure! A lot of them. But you could pick one out and then have a doctor look her over. That way you'd be sure."

Jeff leaned way over the bar. "Confidentially, Wek, the doctors are sick too. Everybody sickee! You ever hear of the *lossfell,* Wek?"

"I've heard about it but I don't believe that kind of stuff. Nobody's skin ever gets *that* loose! But a lot of people here got . . . "

"Sickee, sickee, that's what they got! Only you no sickee and me no sickee too. Make you feel proud, Wek? Just think!"

"Think? Huh! Sometimes I worry," Wek said. He polished hard at the lone faucet in the sink. "Only once in a while though—not often. Not me! Huh! All the boys here do. And not because you put all that money in the flower pots for them to find either. Money isn't . . . Sometimes we all want to help. Remember the time Selfi tried to? Remember?"

"Shuddup! Hear that, Wek?"

"Sorry."

"OK, Wek. All I said was 'Shuddup'. That doesn't mean a thing. Don't get sore. Tell me some more about old Gainsy, Wek."

"Mr. Gains," Wek said, "the man you replaced. And he wasn't old! He was still a young man and a fine . . . "

"He was funny," Jeff said. "He was a damn scream, old Gainsborough was. I met him in the Company office in New York before I . . . You know what he does, Wek? Wears a tight belt when he takes a hot shower. Afraid he's going to step on his own skin!"

"Nonsense," Wek said. "He was a fine young man. It was just flies. Flies bothered him and you know how that goes. All day he'd hold his hand this way and then he'd . . ."

"No flies where he is now, Wek."

"Good," Wek said. He refilled his sand saucer from a tin can stashed under the bar and placed a neat row of limes beside the saucer. "Glad to hear it, Mr. Brenn. Now let's . . ."

"Screens," Jeff said. "His room has screens now. The house furnished the small mesh ones, and the Company furnished the heavy ones behind it. They thought a lot of old Gainsy."

"Mr. Gains," Wek said. "A fine man. You should have met him when he first got here."

"Yes," Jeff said. He rubbed his hands dry on the side of his pants. "Look, Wek. I listen to you make one crack like that and I waste my last four drinks. So pour me four more." He turned to watch the porter switch on the lights. A generator throbbed faintly, the lights not yet steady. By the time the man had made his rounds, moths were beginning to flutter in. They hit the lighted bulbs with soft thuds and spiralled dustily to the floor, spinning. "Good God, Wek. Suppose I had a real, honest-to-God, live, pretty girl sitting next to me—right now. Right here! Is that too much to ask?" Wek looked up, then quickly down again. He was giving one corner of the sink minute attention. "A blonde, Wek. Just let's say a blonde. With light blue eyes. Huh, Wek? Say something! Long white arms and legs! Smooth, waxy legs—no hairs on 'em and clean and fresh and shiny! Huh, Wek? And long soft hair pulled back tight behind her ears. Clean ears, Wek! Pink! Clean face and a real red mouth. And long legs, Wek! Long and shiny! Hard ones! With a thin yellow dress on. Jesus! I'd . . ."

"A very pretty girl," Wek said quietly.

"She still comes in here once in a while? Does she, Wek? Say something! Answer me. Please, Wekker!"

"Not on Sundays."

"I didn't ask that. I just asked if she ever comes in here anymore."

"During the week only when you're in your office—when you're not here. Is that what you want me to say? You want another drink, Mr. Brenn?"

"Yes. She drinks, Wek? What does she . . ."

"Lime juice," Wek said. He dug at the corner of the sink with a rubbery fingernail. "Lime juice with a little soda in it. That's all. And a little sugar."

"Does he ever come in here with her?"

"Who?"

"Her husband."

"No."

"The dumb swine! The dumb, dirty, stupid, sick swine! He's not only a swine, he's a sick swine with a black peanut heart! He's . . ."

"Too loud," Wek said. "Please! The boys'll be peeking around the corners again and you'll start throwing . . ."

"Too loud," Jeff said. "She can play the piano as loud as she wants around here and I can't even talk. She plays so loud, I can hear it nights. She must live around here. Some time I'm going to follow her and see where. She plays Chopin, Wek. Appropriate, huh Wek? Sometimes she plays all night long when it's so Christly hot and quiet and I stand by the window and way way off across the river I can hear somebody call me and I go out there—I really do—way out there alone and . . ."

"I used to play a piano," Wek said, "back in Switzerland. And I just wish we had . . ."

"You couldn't beat a drum, Wek. Confidentially, not even in Patagonia, that is. Much less a piano in Switzerland!"

"If there was one here, I'd prove it!"

"You couldn't prove you're alive! That's what's wrong with you!"

"You want to eat dinner now, Mr. Brenn?"

"No!"

"The boys are ready to serve it and on Saturday nights they like to . . ."

Jeff walked to the dining room, stepping gingerly over the polished dance floor, careful to keep his heels from breaking the silence. His table was set and the waiter pulled back his chair, face immobile. For a moment Jeff stared at him as though he were a fixture and then at the steaming tureen of soup on an adjacent table. "No," Jeff said.

"No thanks. Maybe later," he said. "Maybe I'll have some later. Here, have some money. Take a lot and have fun! And split it with that belly-robber friend of mine in the kitchen."

He walked the length of the grass carpet to the stair and up to his room. The shutters were closed and the room was hot and sour-smelling from dead kitchen odors, trapped. He took off his white coat and threw it across the room. Then he slipped down the knot of his tie and fell diagonally across the bed. There was a mad throbbing at the base of his skull and his shirt stuck to his back.

It was a little past midnight when he awoke. The cuticle around his fingernails felt tender and sore where the roaches had nibbled it down to the live tissue. Someone had opened the shutters and a thousand stars were softly framed in the open window. He undressed and threw his damp, wrinkled clothes into a corner and stood by the washstand, soaking his fingertips in the tepid water and bathing his hot temples and aching neck. His body felt damp as he slipped into his pajamas and groped for his slippers. At the door he picked up a light walking stick and quietly let himself out.

The bar was closed and the dim night-light in the lobby threw grotesque shadows on the wall. A huge clock on a pillar, face unglassed, slammed out the seconds. Jeff helped himself to cigarettes and matches, then pushed open the heavy door and tiptoed down the steps to the dusty ground-shell street.

The night was dark and quiet, a skyful of stars outlining the motionless palm fronds overhead, yellow sputtering lights marking the street corners. He walked slowly, not caring where he went. His slippers made only a soft scuffing sound and now and then a dead leaf scraped drily over another. He passed the shuttered frame houses and listened to the muffled coughs. Someone was always and always and forever coughing. Day and night. Dry high-pitched hawking and shell-dust coughing. The sound barked out from somewhere within the house he was passing and then from across the street and again faintly from the distance. "I walk along the Street of Sorrow!" Jeff called it out, loud, then bristled and spun around at the sound of his voice. "A Bastardly Boulevard of Broken Lungs!" he said, louder.

Listlessly, he turned a corner and found himself in front of the convent. The waist-high marl wall in front was white and chaste-looking, the tiny crystals like miniature stars. He brushed off a section of the top and struck a match, examining it closely for ants and bugs. Then he pulled himself up and dangled his feet, thumping the wall

with his heels. "Quiet," he thought. "Everything's dead. Everything just died this minute!" He turned slightly as the faint tinkle of a bell reached his ears. The sound came from somewhere deep inside the darkened building behind him. "Ice in a glass?" he thought. "Could be, but isn't. Ice is habit forming stuff," he thought, "that's not it."

He kept thinking of what might be going on in there. They could be having an eyeglass-stomping party, he thought, but hardly. Slam your glasses against a stone-block wall would make a sound like that, he thought. Or how about a garter-snapping party? A little bell on a garter and then snap it on a hard white thigh would make a sound like that, he thought, if you were constituted to put up with bell-ringing preliminaries. But Naa! Think they'd wear fancy garters in there? Silk underpants? Naa! But what did they wear? Some kind of rough stuff. Sackcloth! That's what it was! Sackcloth and then ashes too, of course. Ashes on their heads and sackcloth on their behinds! Rattan underpants! Good, thick, substantial, woven-underwater, unbendable, sackclothable Rattan-pants!

Stop it, he thought. He jabbed his stick into the ground beside the wall. The movement startled a large rat nosing around the base of a nearby palm. It scurried to the protection of the shadows, ran whisker-to-wall along the base and disappeared between the square iron bars of the gate. "They follow me around!" Jeff said, and the high sharp sound of his voice made his body-skin suddenly crawl and pull tight. He spun around to look at the other side of the wall. Wek's right, he thought, they stink! "Rats!" he said loudly. "Where are you, Rat? Where is my wandering rat tonight? Come here, my friend. A rat is a rat is to ratify yourself!" The bell inside the building tinkled again. "Ratation!" Jeff called out. "Raterpolate! So you won't answer, huh? Well then, Ratifigoddamnation, you bell!"

It wasn't a rat at all, he thought, nor a mouse in the bar last night. But yes they were. That wasn't a bell I just heard but yes it was. It was a little silver bell, delicate, engraved with a hang-tough motto and somebody turned over in sleep and was lonely and frightened at the unearthly silence and just barely tipped the little bell over and it made a friendly sound and now . . .

He shifted his weight and leaned over on an elbow. I've got to be decent to Wekker, he thought, and quit teasing him. Because he's my friend and someday I'll tell him so too! Sometimes he worries about me, Jeff thought. Imagine! And it's not the money I hide in his eternal bar rag and the . . . And it wasn't too long ago, he thought,

that I first saw her . . . He was sitting in the lobby that Sunday morning, alone, trying not to think of the insufferable heat, when she walked in. "Good morning, Wekker," she called. Even the sound of her voice was cool and light and lemon-fresh from a windswept hillside, he remembered. "All right if I play the piano?" Her eyes really were light light blue and sparkling wet.

"But of course, ma'am!" Wek said. "Anytime! Anytime at all!" Switzerland Wek who knew what it was to want to play the piano and not have the opportunity or perhaps want something as much as life itself but never get it. "An honor!" Wek said.

Jeff looked past his magazine and watched her walk to the empty corner. Her pale-yellow dress was of some wispy material that billowed out behind her as she walked. It pressed against her thighs in front and showed the outline of her knees and her firm round legs. Her blond hair was pulled back tight from her face and held in back with a simple gold clasp. Her hands were like living, tinted wax and as she struck the first experimental chord, her lips parted a splinter's width and she tossed her head to one side. She swayed gently, a soft outline undulating on the bench. Jeff looked at her round white arms, creamy and full—the shiny smoothness. And her legs! They were bare and glossy and firm. Not a scar, not a blemish, not a swollen chigger bite on the ankles. Nothing to mar the smooth white shininess.

Suddenly he felt himself rising and strolling toward the bar. As he walked past her, he averted his face, whistling drily, then suddenly aware of the vaguely-familiar, spicy perfume that beat into his veins. He sat at the bar and ordered a whiskey-soda.

"Hot today, isn't it, Wekker?"

"Yes sir," Wek said. "Make the wind come knock me today, Sahib! It's always hot here, Mr. Brenn, but feels like today's going to be a melt-me-downer!" He wiped his face in the crook of his elbow and went back to the sink.

"May I ask you a simple question, Wek, and get a simple answer? No rush. Think it over."

"But of course! Anytime! Anytime at all! An honor!"

"What the hell are you always and always and forever doing in that goddamn sink?"

"Cleaning up, Mr. Brenn."

"What makes it so dirty around here?"

"Oh, bugs and roaches mostly. Run all over everything. I got to

keep washing everything. Mice too."

"You agree then?" Jeff said. "About the mice. Huh, Wek? Go ahead. Admit it now!"

"Bush mice, Mr. Brenn. You can't keep 'em out. And if you don't wash up behind 'em, Oh me Goddo! They got some kind of powder on 'em and when that gets wet . . ."

"Makes a paste, eh?"

"Smells," Wek said. "High and sort of ripe. Even a little sweet like that pink talcum when it gets wet. One time I . . . "

"OK, Wek. *Okay!* Now look at your hands," Jeff said. "Just look at them!"

Wek held his hands up and looked them over critically. They were swollen and water-wrinkled and the nails were soft and thin. "It's from always having them in water, Mr. Brenn. And the lime juice. Lime juice'll do that to your hands. Acid in the peel. And roaches. Forget to pull your net down some night and they'll fly in and . . ."

"Roaches, my foot! It's from slopping around in that sink all the time. Don't do it, Wek!"

Wek threw the lime peel into a bucket under the sink and wiped his hands on his apron.

"Give me another drink, Wek. And if you want to dissolve your hands in that sink, go ahead!"

Wek took the glass and poured the whiskey over the ice remaining in the glass and filled it with soda. He slid it deftly across the bar and turned quickly away. The heat rose in thick moist waves and through it Jeff could feel the soft, easy beat of the piano, bewitching, his whole body wanting to squirm, a huge knot in his viscera holding him rigid.

"*Wekker!* For God's sake!"

"What?"

"Who's that girl playing the piano?"

"There's a girl in here and she's playing a piano?" Wek, back turned, seemed to query the bottles he was arranging with such fine precision on the bar shelf. "Hmmmm, Mr. Brenn. I don't know who she is." He tapped one of the bottles the width of a dust mote back into line. "I never met her," he said.

"Come in here often?"

"No," Wek said. He squinted along the row of bottles and tapped another one into place. "No, I can't say she does. These shelves sure get dusty, don't they, Mr. Brenn? If I don't . . ."

"Alone?"

"Oh sure. Always. Shall I fill it up, Mr. Brenn?"

"Yes please. And thank you, Wek! That's the first time you ever asked me that." They looked at each other closely, only the width of the bar between them. "She plays a piano like an artist," Jeff said. "Just listen to it! A girl so pretty you can't breathe right and then she can . . ."

"Let me tell you about Switzerland," Wek said, "when I was young. I took piano lessons and if we only had . . ."

"Please," Jeff said, "don't! Don't repeat yourself. And don't argue. Just ask me that question again, will you?"

"Shall I fill it up, Mr. Brenn?"

"Yes please, Mr. Wekker."

"That's they way to order 'em up, Mr. Brenn! You drink a lot but not fast enough. On a day like this, drink it faster! A *piano!*" Wek said. "Good *God!*"

"I'm doing the best I can, Wek. Just don't goad me! And tell one of the boys to clean those piano keys. With alcohol!"

"Yes sir."

Jeff sat with his elbows on the edge of the bar, hearing the throbbing beat of the piano, watching Wek halve another lime. He looked into his glass, studying it intently, suddenly clenching it in his fist and draining it in one long gulp. Wek placed the bottle on the bar and turned his back.

In less than an hour she was gone. He watched her rise, her face long and narrow, ghostly pale now. She walked to the stair landing with haughty, long-limbed strides, pirouetted, her wispy dress billowing far to one side. Then she was gone.

"Couldn't you say something to her, Wek? Couldn't you even say 'Goodbye' or 'Please come back sometime'? You have to stand there like a lump of wet meat and just let her go and . . ."

"She's gone? Well, let 'em all go," Wek said. "But don't break the romantic spell by talking it over with 'em." He took a glass and started to polish it. "In these romantic places, you only say 'Goodbye' once, Mr. Brenn. You know that! Don't louse the romance! Listen!" He set down the glass, snapped the towel and swung into high falsetto. *"The romantic tropical moonlight and the motionless palms and the white sand on the beaches and the soft stars!"* He slammed the towel against the wall over the sink and dropped his voice. "Soft stars, Mr. Brenn! And soft heads! And soft bugs and hard centipedes a foot long and . . ."

"Three feet, Wek! Not . . ."

"OK. Three feet. You want to eat dinner now, Mr. Brenn?"

"What's for dinner?"

"Same thing every Sunday noon, Mr. Brenn. Chicken soup, red snapper, roast beef, string beans. Canned peaches for dessert. Libby's. Always the same Sunday noon."

"Real chicken today," Jeff said. "I can smell the wet feathers." He tore at the knot in his tie and slipped it down. The sweat ran unhindered down his neck. "Bring me a bottle of high-wine at my table, Wek. In an ice pail. And tell Selfi I want to talk to him. Right now!"

The soup was scalding hot. It tasted unsalted and smelled greasy. He could feel the hot steam of it on his face as he sat there. The steam condensed on the spoon handle and made his fingers slippery. The waiter hovered near and then, without waiting for instructions, removed the bowl of hot soup and carried it back to the kitchen, winking at the porter en route as they passed each other.

The porter stood at mock attention, eyes sparkling, grinning widely. He asked, "Something, sir?"

"Yes. Big job for you, Selfi. Makee muchee monee!"

"Yes sir."

"Know any girls?"

"Yes sir! Many!" He chuckled and bent down to laugh. "Yes *sir!* Fine ones! Big ones and . . ."

"Bring one up to my room."

"Just now? In the daytime?"

"Right now! Bring one up there and tell her to wait. I'll be up in a little while. After I eat. Here, take this." He placed a bill on the corner of the table.

"Thank you! Thank you, *sir!*" The man scooped up the bill and stepped aside as Wek brought the ice bucket to the table.

The door of his room was ajar and Jeff knew someone was inside even before entering. She sat on the edge of the bed, sagging it deeply, grinning coyly.

"Hello," she said simply. "You send for me?"

"Yes I did," Jeff said. "It was nice of you to come. Selfi told you?"

"Oh yes! I know!" She smiled.

"Would you like some wine? Or some coffee or some cigars or something? What would you . . ."

"You want I off my clothes now, Mahn?"

"Well, yeah, off 'em. Might as well." He was leaning against the door-jamb, trying to run his wet fingers through his hair.

She leaned over and took off her shoes. Her feet were wide and flat to the floor. Her ankles were thick and chigger-bitten and the backs of her heels were grayish-pink. She undid her blouse and slipped it off, not looking up. The blouse was spotlessly white, stiff with starch and wax-ironing. She hooked it stiff on the back of a chair and as she reached over, Jeff saw the backs of her heels again. They were turning brilliantly pink. Then she loosened one of the straps holding her slip. The harsh white light beat through the open window and the heat-flies buzzed madly about the room. There was a sweat-dried-in-talcum-powder smell in the air. Chalky and acridly sweet. She coughed. She struggled with the other strap and finally slipped it over her heavy shoulder.

"Let's have some wine," Jeff said. "No?"

She looked up at him. "First, Mister Mahn," she said, "I tell you wahn ting."

"Tell me wahn ting, you Percheron then! What?"

"I have wahn sickee sore."

"I don't care you have wahn hunderd! Percheron!"

"You want I put wahn piece paper over she, Mahn?"

"Wait!" Jeff said. "You wait and . . ." He whirled and struck the half-open door head on. He backed and tore through the open part, down the stairs and brought up in front of the bar.

"Wek! Wek! Here! Take this!" He shoved a roll of bills across the bar. "Take this upstairs to my room! There's somebody in there and give it to her. All of it! Tell her I'm sick or I had to go someplace and I won't be back. Quick!"

Wek took the money and melted through the door behind the bar. He was back before Jeff could light a cigarette.

"That's all right, Mr. Brenn," Wek said. "They get in the hotel sometimes. They sneak up the back stairs. I'll tell the boys to watch it better." He lighted Jeff's cigarette and then quickly averted his face. "And now, what'll it be, Mr. Brenn? So hot today!"

"Mix me some black velvet, Mahn. A lot of it!"

"The champagne's all warm. No ice either—won't get any 'til they turn on the generator tonight. How about some lime juice and soda?"

"No! Black velvet, Mahn! I like it warm!" He watched eagerly as Wek poured out the half glassful of stout and then added the

fizzing, warm champagne. It bubbled and hissed as though boiling and sprayed his nostrils as he tilted his glass and poured it down. The sweat stood out in big drops on his forehead. It ran down his cheeks and dripped from his jaw. "Warm again today, isn't it, Wek?"

"It's always warm in here," Wek said. "No air gets in here. Stuffy."

"What difference does it make if air gets in here or not? It'd still be hot air, wouldn't it? Well? *Wouldn't it?"* Jeff's eyes were glassy and the sound of his voice came to him from far, far off—an old, lost, beat-up echo—returning at last. "Tell me about the hot air, Wek."

"Aw, Mr. Brenn," Wek said, "my clothes are stuck to me now. Even my shoes are wet. If we start to argue, it'll just be . . ."

"OK, then. All right. How is it with dogs then, Wek?"

"Dogs?"

"You told me to send for a dog once, didn't you? Remember?"

"Dogs are nice," Wek said. "They make good pals. Shall I keep filling it up, Mr. Brenn? Keep it full? If you drink it faster, it'll cool you off quicker."

"Yeah. Remember what you told me about how those white dogs got those black spots?"

"I wish I'd never mentioned it," Wek said. "You want me to get you a towel, Mr. Brenn? You're getting wet as . . ."

"It's raining in here, Wek. Just a romantic, tropical, tepid rainstorm. Romantic as the hell!" His elbow slipped off the edge of the bar and landed in his lap. "Or maybe this goddamn rathouse is on fire!" He teetered on his stool and tried to stand up. "Know something, Wekker?"

"What?" Wek curled his fingers over the edge of the bar as though ready to vault it. "Have another," Wek said. "A quick one!"

"You should have been on one of those trips with Columbus, Wek. The second one."

"Why?"

"Columbus'd kicked your fat butt right over the side of the Pinta Maria for saying that. About those white dogs with the black spots."

"Yes sir."

He sucked noisily at his glass and blew the foam and the sweat from his upper lip. "Dogs bark a lot, don't they, Wek?"

"Some of them do. Not all of them."

"Bark at the moon, don't they?"

"Sometimes they'll do that. They quit when you say so though. You can train them. In Switzerland I once had a . . ."

"A goddamn piano! I know! But can you train a dog to take his fur coat off?"

"No," Wek admitted. "That's all they have and . . ."

"How would you like to wear a fur coat, Wek? Come on now! Tell me! For Christ's sake tell me how you'd like to always and always and forever have to wear a fur coat! Tell me that, Wek! Give me a simple answer for once!"

"I wouldn't like it."

"Well then, quit trying to sell me a bunch of dogs!"

"Yes sir."

"And where is she?"

"Home, I guess."

"I know! But *where?*"

"Let me fill up that glass again," Wek said.

Now the heat was a solid flame that had him pinned against the bar. He struck at it, viciously, fanning with half-closed fist. His arm muscles shrivelled and shrank into hard knots as he reached for his glass again.

After a while Wek placed the empty champagne bottle and the three empty stout bottles on the sink and went around to the front of the bar. "Let's go upstairs now." Wek said. "You've had an awful lot today, Mr. Brenn. Really my fault but. . . ."

"Keep your hands off me, Wekker! Y'hear?" He brushed Wek's hand from his sleeve. "Talk but don't touch!"

"But I just thought . . ."

"Never mind what you think! Keep your fat roach fingers off me! You just want to argue! Go sit in your dirty sink!"

"Yes sir."

Jeff lurched in a long curve toward the stairs, grasped the rail loosely and stopped. The stairs extended high, high up to no ending, into the dim grayness. He took the steps one at a time, clinging to the rail, knees buckling. At the half-landing, he turned and began the second half of the climb. And then there was that rat. It was three steps above him—where it always waited for him—just obscenely quivering there, getting larger and smaller and larger and smaller. Its nose vibrated into a grayish blur and its white whisker-hairs were pulled back tightly against its long thin cheeks. Its rubbery tail dropped limply off the edge of the step, coiled itself,

then lashed out like a whip. Now the rat suddenly appeared on the step above, reared up, smelling and snuffling its paws. They were pink and covered with a soft, powdery bloom. Jeff uttered an obscenity and stumbled up the stairs, kicking and lurching from rail to rail.

At the top of the stair the rat turned and humped itself down the long dark hallway, half a kick beyond reach of Jeff's feet. Just before reaching the door to his room, Jeff saw the round black hole in the baseboard. With a final snap of its tail, the rat disappeared into it while Jeff slammed into the wall, kicking at the hole below, beating the wall with his fists.

Wek was there then. Perhaps he'd followed behind or perhaps he'd taken the back stairs. Perhaps he'd been worried. His arm was around Jeff's waist and he held him in a firm grip. "What's the matter, Mr. Brenn? What happened?"

"That rat waiting for me again! Then he runs down the hall and . . ."

"A rat, Mr. Brenn?"

"In that hole down there, Wek! For God's sake! Some day I'll . . ."

The marl wall began to feel wet and clammy and through his thin pyjamas Jeff could feel the sharp little crystals numbing his skin. He slid down and let his feet touch the ground. He felt weak and old. Very old. Wearily he started back to the hotel. He stopped and listened for a possible last tinkle from the bell but two dry leaves scratched out a sound and from far off the sleepy call of a night bird. Wek was right of course, he thought, but when did you start to admit it? Infallible Wek with his sandy lime peels and his eternal bar rag was always right. Good, old anchor-man Wek. On that hot Sunday afternoon in particular, Wek was right. God, but he'd been right!

Upstairs there in that hallway, Wek released his grip around Jeff's waist and gently took his arm. "There's a hole?" he asked kindly, looking down. "Now you show me where it is and I'll have one of the boys . . . Sorry, Mr. Brenn."

# ELEANOR ROSS TAYLOR:

## Gus Duke and Mamma

He came bringing us a milkpail full
Of speckled, wild, goose plums—
All fat unsmeltout perfumedom—
And perched on the back porch curb to taste a few.
"Sour! Your eyes'll water, Miss Jennie!
But sweet, too."
Mamma's way was posing by the silent pool
And tossing in the line amiss
That shook the skies of the other world
And all but loosed the roots of this.
She trimmed and trained the roundabout backwoods,
Admitted, glad, he had a devilish eye,
This Gus his grandpa took, from habitude
(Wild grand-Dukes screeched a nearing neighborhood).
"Your Papa doesn't favor your going there.
I say, enter evil to cure evil, if you dare!"
As she went about her orphan household chores
She overlooked them with a lavish bow
Inspired by that heroine of poems,
Her elocution teacher, Miss Addie Yow.
"Nothing to do? In this world of ours?
Where weeds spring daily amidst sweet flowers?"
Your-mammy-never-came-to-much-my-Gus.

"Don't drink that Mackling Spring's brack water
Whe'r it's high or low; the cows stand in there and let go."
But old Duke's beard was fitting moss for campfire
When they took their kitchen rations to the woods.
Mamma's boys looked out for sassafras, but Gus
Made frog gigs, thrashed Mackling Spring into a suds.
("I say, dear boys! Be good. Take care.
But learn a little evil! if you dare. . . .")
His thirst once drunk, turned drunken,
And Gus Duke tossed all night, all day,

Made rusty speeches on old swapping knives,
Called names that paled the sallow-boned herbwives,
Tore off the sleeping clothes, his bed's, his own,
And never seemed to wake.
His boyish modesty ran dry.
At last the hands cooled, then the face.
Mamma stood at his bedside.
She overlooked him with a sprightly brow
Inspired by that gay mistress of mad poesy
Her elocution teacher, Miss Addie Yow.
" 'Stop stop pretty waters' cried Mary one day
'My vessel my flowers you carry away.' "

While Papa mourned one poor lost soul to hell
And worlds to conquer, conquered on one's knees,
Turned on to face, Miss Jennie dropped a tear
Like a larkspur petal, and felt the decrease
In evil a heinous waste.
Later, her scorn for plums came back to stay,
But there in the ticking brown room for a while
Her hands cooped her face, cooped her plight,
Like a bird's wings—a gesture, she knew,
Would have caused Miss Addie to smile.

## Physiology to Psychology

You were like a strange older child, my sweet,
Strapping the hopeless skates on my lax feet;
When I came running forward for your hand,
Pushing me backward as a reprimand.
You handed me a paper love, attached
A kerosene ointment; you struck the match—
A blinding, deafening groan.
I wrapped my arms about myself.
"Stop!" you cried, this ruin saved for me alone.

When we were young, no history was lost;
Now not a day without ten riddles set

Of what I don't know, yet I can't forget:
My mother's voice blank as the day with frost,
Whether the winters were not harder then. . . .
Our feet were wrapped in tow sacks for the snow
(Don't touch! Don't take! Don't know!
Run out and play; come in.)—
After you I go, my life!
Was it chase or flight?

We were together then.
We dozed. The flying
Owls in the dark crying
Like scissors whacking the vegetation
To the side, to the front,
To here, to dream turns white—
"Dear dream, do not go," I cried.
Your outstretched hand replied
With the dazzling light.

Now I wait daily the day we part,
Cling, still unshed, rough scab of heart,
Like one awaked, at night, too soon,
Clutching my foil pillow, abed in the moon.

## Woman as Artist

I'm mother.
I hunt alone.
There is no bone
Too dry for me, mother,
Or too extra.

Have a care, boy.
The neat pearls nibbling at the chowder
Gently, with joy,
Contain powder.

An emigrant from the mother tongue
To say-so in the silent one,

For me the stepped-for step sinks,
The expected light winks
Out; dear self, do not think
On the ominous appetite rising insistently
In the hour of no food. . . .
Do not think of the mice in the clock
When you start up in your sleeping hood.
The light feathers of a year,
Too fine to make a pillow,
Not fine enough to wear
Out anywhere, drop but
Like milk into the snow
Of what I say and bear.

Kneel, fathers.
If my babies are right,
It is not because of you!
Or me.
But I lick them dearly,
Scrutinize their toilette,
Every tendril pleasing
On account of me.

Next year I'll dig them up
And separate them.
They'll multiply
  Multiply
    Multiply
Till the round earth cousins Babel trumpets,
Some dark, some light,
Some streakedy.

When I first gave the question life,
The howling, undressed question, life,
Did I not have some inkling of the answer,
And the answer answered,
The door that closed across the room
As my door opened?

In the morning, early,
Birds flew over the stable,
The morning glories ringed the flapping corn
With Saturn faces for the surly light,
And stars hung on the elder night.

But in the afternoon
Clouds came;
Cyclonic gusts and chilling rain
Banged-to the windows of our heroine
Beginning to chronicle her wound-up skein.
Rib, spin.

# TOM W. HARRIS:

## Totem Pole

Totem pole, beaked eagle and kingfisher—
My grandfather's madness
Stood face on face and claw on crest to the height where he hollered and looked down,
The oblique creator and exacerbator of a family of faces puddled.
The stack,
The weasel masks and fat wide faces, were his own,
And the long-snouted
And the short-snouted
The dreaming bird
And the eyes like wire
The eyes like flies
And the hunting face.
The gray cirrus streaming from the top was wine of rhododendron,
Bitterroot, solomon seal, prophecy and chicanery;
Mountain stones and river mud and the clink of silver dollars
Were the waving words he thudded, burst or spiraled
Down to the scatter of our own strange faces:
Shocked scattered open flowers, cornhusks, vulvas, buckwheat hulls.

# W. H. GASS:

## Gertrude Stein: Her Escape from Protective Language

It has not proved helpful to the understanding of Gertrude Stein's creative works that she wrote so much herself to justify and explain them. It has not been helpful either that her autobiographies are rich and charming or that she took such care with the rituals of genius, finally fashioning for herself a personality as eloquent and commanding as her Roman face. Of this she never tired, and she began again and again. But in her life she knew too many foolish men and women, became too willingly a legend among them, something to be seen in Paris like the Eiffel Tower. They attacked her with their admiration and she encouraged it. She gave them manuscripts to market and they handed them around as signs of their complete release from common sense. She composed their portraits and they read these aloud and had them printed on expensive paper and dropped them about like cards of visitation. Her art must have seemed an ideal medium for making known their own confusions, and I imagine it was comforting to see how all of it proceeded from one so sure, oracular, and solid. All in all she was a gesture more decisive and more meaningful than they could ever make themselves, and when they left her it was often to wobble about the world like Mabel Dodge, enshrining foolishness. They would receive their portraits and they would write to say how pleased their friends were, how delighted. "Am I really like that, Gertrude? how very wonderful to be!"

Her stories, poems, and plays lie beside the mass of modern literature like a straight line by a maze and give no hold to the critic bent on explication. Art to be successful at nearly any time dare not be pure. It must be able to invite the dogs. It must furnish bones for the understanding. Interest then has sought the substitutes that she provided for it. There has been prolonged and largely malicious gossip about her and her circle and those famous friendships that finally faded. And there have been all those horrid little essays whose titles she might have enjoyed arranging into piles: The Notion of Time in Gertrude Stein, repeated again and again. Only a few people, and nearly all of them are writers, have done as Donald Sutherland ad-

vises in his book about her (the advice comes too late for Mr. Sutherland to have taken it):

> Forget all this talk about her work and do not prepare to have an opinion of your own to tell. Simply read her work as if that were to be all.[1]

Gertrude Stein has mostly been, therefore, an anecdote and a theory and a bundle of quotations. The advice of Mr. Sutherland is certainly simple but it seems too hard. Once admired by a few without judgment, she is now censured by many without reason, and that perplexity her work and person have created, as Coleridge noted the connection, has contained sufficient fear to predispose some minds to anger.

B. L. Reid, whose book is the most recent attack,[2] makes all the customary substitutions. He describes it, with an easy presumption of its power, as "an essay in decapitation" and he genuinely believes that it destroys her reputation. On the other hand, Mr. Reid insists, Gertrude Stein has no literary reputation. She is "effectively dead as a writer" and "nobody really reads her." The critics have ignored her and all the important essays about her can be lightly ticked across the fingers of a single hand. As a result she occupies her present literary position by default. It is Mr. Reid's intention, apparently, to drag Miss Stein from the dizzy height to which ignorance, calumny and neglect have raised her. But there has been a "sizable flurry" of books about her; Yale is unaccountably printing her previously unpublished work; and while no one reads her "everybody continues to talk knowingly and concernedly about her." Mr. Reid must have been standing on this shore of his confusion when he subtitled his book "a dissenting opinion," for these words imply the presence in it of a carefully composed and calmly judicial argument, fashioned to overcome an opposition equally deliberate and well-defined, while his book is, in fact, a muddled and angry piece of journalese whose only value lies in how well it expresses the normal academic reaction and how superbly it contains and how characteristically it uses those malicious inferences fear lends so readily to anger.

The first of these inferences is double-jointed. It permits Mr. Reid

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[1] Sutherland, Donald. *Gertrude Stein: a Biography of Her Work*. Yale University Press, New Haven (1951), p. 200.

[2] Reid, B. L. *Art by Subtraction: a Dissenting Opinion of Gertrude Stein*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman (1958).

to malign Miss Stein's work by maligning Miss Stein, and her work, of course, is the major source of evidence against her.

He begins his book with an anthology of critical exclamations, nearly all violent, amid which he tries to find his place as an impartial judge, one who will refrain from the mindless flattery or the vulgar abuse Miss Stein customarily receives. Too many critics, he complains, disturbed by the degree of their feelings, fail to bed their conclusions safely on a text and try to make their points by shouting. But Mr. Reid's claim to objectivity and scholarship is sheer pretense, a rhetorical stance that he assumes to aim his blows, most of which follow a feint toward generosity.

> There is no point in vilifying Gertrude Stein. She is the victim of her pathology rather than her villainy. (205)
> . . . one cannot, of course, impugn her sexuality. Dark suspicions are certainly possible, but I am more inclined to attribute her literary attitude toward sex to that pathological ability to compartmentalize her mind that I have called near schizophrenic. (74)
> If Gertrude Stein is a genius, she is one in the vulgar sense of the term: perversely elevated, isolated, inhuman. (170)

As Mr. Reid proceeds, like a warrior given courage by his own noise, he enlarges his anger, showing he can make his points as loudly as anybody.

> It is finally just to say that Gertrude Stein's true position is anti-literary, anti-intellectual, and often antihumane and antimoral. Her whole orientation is ruthlessly egocentric. (191)

Not satisfied with this list of crimes, Mr. Reid goes on to "document" what he repeatedly calls Miss Stein's schizophrenic pathology by complaining that she once confessed that anything in oil on a flat surface could hold her attention ("indiscriminate ingestiveness"), that she described a fire once as "one of those nice American fires that have so many horses and firemen to attend them" ("antihumane and egocentric"), that she referred to war as a form of dancing ("monumental detachment"), that she liked to arrange buttons and hunt hazel nuts ("enormous patience with triviality"), enjoyed Burma Shave rhymes ("unproductive catholicity") and never learned to speak French perfectly ("ivory tower").[3]

If in the first instance Mr. Reid replaces Miss Stein's work with

[3] Strangely Mr. Reid makes little use of Wyndham Lewis, who attacked Miss Stein in *Time and Western Man,* and he does not seem to know Katherine Anne Porter's essay, "The Wooden Umbrella," which is one of the most rhetorically effective personal attacks in modern literature.

Miss Stein, in the second he substitutes her critical writings for her creative ones. And these he systematically misreads. In a book that is heavily marbled with quotation, there are only a few examples from her creative work and even these are used for autobiographical purposes. There is not a single analysis of any of her stories, poems, and plays. Mr. Reid gives no concrete evidence of having read them, and surely this is the critic's first responsibility.[4]

The critical essays show Miss Stein at her best, Mr. Reid says, but he brings to their explication the willful literal-mindedness of an investigating congressman. He is so intent upon conviction that he often misses the tone of her language,[5] fails to follow the directions in the context,[6] supplies no historical background for her remarks,[7] blurs essential distinctions,[8] and is prevented from dealing justly with some of the ideas he does understand because he regards them, having come from Miss Stein, as peculiar and mad, even though they may be (and are) characteristic of an entire movement in modern literature that begins at least as far back as Gautier's preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* and contains many of the most important literary figures of our time. One example of his way of reading should be enough.

In *The Geographical History of America* Miss Stein writes:

> It is only in history government, propaganda that it is of any importance if anybody is right about anything. Science well they never are right about anything not right enough so that science cannot go on enjoying itself as if it is interesting, which it is. . . . Master-pieces have always known that being right would not be anything because if they were right then it would not be as they wrote but as they thought and in a real master-piece there is no thought, if there were thought then there would be that they are right and in a master-piece you cannot be right, if you could it would be what you thought not what you do write.
> Write and right.
> Of course they have nothing to do with one another.[9]

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[4] What should we think of someone who undertook to estimate the achievement of Henry James by reading the prefaces and *The Middle Years,* examining some of the letters, and studying Percy Lubbock?

[5] Her remark about the nice American fires, for instance, p. 193.

[6] *Ibid.* War is dancing.

[7] As, for example, her allusions to Shelley in the discussion of God and Mammon, Reid, chapter 3.

[8] Between the artist as artist and the artist as citizen, soldier, friend, etc. See below.

[9] *Geographical History,* pp. 198-99. Reid, p. 76. In other words: It is fortunate for science that its methods give only probable and fallible results, for absolutes halt inquiry. Only politicians and propagandists need absolutes. The purpose of art is not the enunciation of such Truths or their discovery, but rather that of presentation and rendering. Masterpieces do not depend upon being True but upon being faithful and exact, for if they depended upon being True, how many of them would there be?

And Mr. Reid declares that this passage makes the "full antimorality and anti-intellectualism of her position abundantly clear." [10] On a page following, Mr. Reid quotes Miss Stein again:

> . . . master-pieces exist because they came to be as something that is an end in itself and in that respect it is opposed to the business of living which is relation and necessity.[11]

This displays "the full preciosity, the distasteful hermetic quality" of her anti-intellectualism.[12] I cannot understand what is precious, distastefully hermetic or anti-intellectual about thinking that the values of masterpieces are intrinsic, or that they constitute a system in themselves or that they are composed for their own sakes, nor is there anything about the Kantian language Miss Stein uses that gives any strength to that impression.

It is clear from the opinions Mr. Reid expresses here and there that Miss Stein's work embodies principles that upset his whole notion of art, but he is so far from grasping what these principles are that he prefers to linger without, talking about her talk about it, where there is safety. And he is naturally upset that anyone should admire these mad babblings or their complacent author or that the English language should absorb any of the qualities of her absurd style. If only she hadn't written *Three Lives;* if only she hadn't insisted on the Picassos when she and Leo split their spoils; [13] if only she hadn't written all those compelling aphorisms or hadn't put together phrases that fasten themselves in the memory like great lines of verse (one wants to laugh at the pigeons on the grass, and does, but the pigeons aren't disturbed and fail to fly); if only William James had thought less highly of her or if Hugo Munsterberg hadn't called her "an ideal student"; [14] if she had lost her wit and magnetism and gone strange as her writing

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[10] Reid, *ibid.* What is evident in this passage is the stumbling in the style, but Mr. Reid never complains about bad writing in this sense.

[11] *What are Masterpieces,* p. 90. Reid, p. 78.

[12] Reid, *ibid.* Compare F. M. Ford: "The one thing you can not do is to propagandise, as author, for any cause. You must not, as author, utter any views: above all you must not fake any events. . . . It is obviously best if you can contrive to be without views at all: your business with the world is rendering, not alteration." *Joseph Conrad.* Duckworth, London (1924), p. 208. Ford does not mean that an author, as a private person, ought to have no opinions. He means what Stein means, that write and right have nothing to do with one another. This may be a mistake but it can scarcely be evidence of pathology.

[13] Leo didn't want them. He wanted the Renoirs, as he didn't care much for Picasso. He always said that Gertrude knew nothing about painting. *The Flowers of Friendship.* Edited by Donald Gallup. Knopf, New York (1953), pp. 86, 91.

[14] *Ibid.,* p. 4.

did, and if her lectures had failed and the soldiers had been bored and if her writing had continued in its obscurity and hadn't, at the close of her life, clarified again and become strong at the end; if she hadn't been so sure of herself, so tough and so consistent; if, really, she hadn't written *Yes Is for a Very Young Man* or "The Coming of the Americans"; then it might be easier to dismiss her as a fraud or a neurotic lady with too much leisure, as a lesbian or a Jew or just another of the wild ones, or as a genius, even, destroyed by ego; Mr. Reid wouldn't have felt any need to write his book. Certainly he would not have felt, against all the facts, so alone with his anger, in the camp of "dissent"—with most of the world on his side.

The writings of Gertrude Stein became a challenge to criticism the moment they were composed and they have remained a challenge. This challenge is of the purest and most direct kind. It is wholehearted and complete. It asks for nothing less than a study of the entire basis of our criticism, and it will not be put off. It requires us to consider again the esthetic significance of style; to examine again the ontological status of the artist's construction; to try to fix, if we can, the location of value in the work; to state, once more, the relation between the artist's vision, his medium, and his effect. None of the literary innovators who were her contemporaries attempted anything like the revolution she proposed, and because her methods were so uncompromising, her work cannot really be met except on the finest and most fundamental grounds. *Finnegans Wake,* for instance, is a work of learning. It can be penetrated by stages. It can be elucidated by degrees. It is a complex, but familiar compound. One can hear at any distance the teeth of the dogs as they feed on its limbs. With Miss Stein, however, one is never able to wet one's wrists before cautiously trusting to the water, nor can one wade slowly in. There the deep clear bottom is at once.

In *Things As They Are,*[15] Gertrude Stein's first story, the pressures that shaped her style show plainly. The novel is a psychological analysis of the relationship among three women, one of whom, Adele, is clearly the author, and it is equally transparent that the fiction is a stratagem against the self to take its secrets, for the novel has no

[15] Written in 1903 and called, significantly, *Quod Erat Demonstrandum,* no effort was made to publish it until it was "discovered" among her things and sent to Louis Bromfield for his opinion in 1931. He found it "vastly interesting" but thought publication would be difficult. (*The Flowers of Friendship, op. cit.,* pp. 249-50.) It was retitled and published by The Banyan Press, Pawlet, Vermont, in 1951. The quotations that follow were taken purposely from the same scene.

other subject than the strength and character of its author's sexuality and the moral price she must pay if she wishes to indulge it. Such an intimate inquiry might have been lurid, should at least have been interesting, but is remarkably dull instead. The self is revenged and keeps its secrets.

The language of *Things As They Are* is not very promising. It is abstract, monotonous, pompous, vague. Circumlocution, euphemism, pedantry bring the story to its knees. Its rhythms are held back; they go with stilted care. Even those passages in which Miss Stein permits herself to touch the air are afraid, and the mark of the graduate essay is everywhere.

> One usually knows very definitely when there is no chance of an acquaintance becoming a friendship [*sic*] but on the other hand it is impossible to tell in a given case whether there is. (15)

The characters cannot pay one another compliments without getting them up like letters of recommendation.

> Adele you seem to me capable of very genuine friendship. You are at once dispassionate in your judgments and loyal in your feelings; tell me will we be friends. (15)

The wit is weary and rhetorical.

> 'You were very generous,' she said 'tell me how much you do care for me.' 'Care for you my dear' Helen answered 'more than you know and less than you think.' (15)

Thought is not permitted any real precision but, held off by the shame and intimacy of the subject, merely apes it. The result is protective speech. One way in writing of not coming near an object is to interpose a kind of neutralizing middle tongue, one that is neither abstractly and impersonally scientific nor directly confronting and dramatic, but one that lies in that gray limbo in between, composed of the commonest words because its objects are the objects of everyday, and therefore a language that is simple and unspecialized, yet one whose effect is flat and sterilizing because its words are held to the simplest naming nouns and verbs, connectives, prepositions, articles and pronouns, the tritest adjectives of value, a few adverbs of quantity and degree, and the automatic flourishes of social speech—good day, how do you do, so pleased. This desire to gain by artifice a safety from the world—to find a way of thinking without the risks of feeling—is the source of the impulse to abstractness and simplicity in Gertrude Stein as it is in much of

modern painting where she felt immediately the similarity of aim.[16]

Protective language names, it never renders. It replaces events with speech. It says two people are in love, it does not show them loving. Jeff and Melanctha talk their passion. Protective language, then, must be precise, for in a world of dangerous objects which by craft of language have been circumvented, there remains a quantity of unfastened feeling that, in lighting elsewhere, will turn a harmless trifle into symbol. Name a rose and you suggest romance, love, civil war, the maidenhead. The English language is so rich in its associations that its literature tends to be complex and carry its meanings on at many levels. Conrad, who, as Ford remarks, wanted to write "a prose of extreme limpidity," often bitterly complained that English words were never words; they were rather instruments for exciting blurred emotions.[17] Protective speech must cut off meanings, not take them on. It must find contexts that will limit the functions of its words to that of naming. Gertrude Stein set about discovering such contexts.

Dull, flat, repetitious, thin, and cowardly—these are the more obvious qualities of this euphemistic language. To these are added, in the experimental stage where disassociation is also sought, the qualities of confusion and tedious surprise. *Things As They Are,* largely written in the simpler style, gets at nothing as it is. Many later works (large portions of *Lucy Church Amiably* for instance), experimenting bravely, choke in the coils of their own locutions. I cannot imagine a language more thoroughly and obstinately inartistic, and Mr. Reid's objections would be fair and mild enough if her course had ended here; but she was often able to take another step, the last available to protective speech: that of giving to her words the feelings that arise from things; that of creating from her words real objects, valuable for themselves, capable of an independent existence, as physical as statuary. In *Things As They Are* one can mark the isolated moments when she struck her special note, but in *Three Lives* she plays a constant music all her own.

The transfer of emotion must be made by means of every physical resource (rhythm, pattern, shape, and sound). How interminably her lovers talk, and how abstractly, yet her rhythms and repeating patterns make an auditory image of the lovers' passion.

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[16] Mr. Reid very frequently complains of the flat effect of this language and comments on its evasiveness.

[17] Ford, *op. cit.,* p. 214. In Reid see ch. 7.

> 'Well you trust me then Melanctha, and I certainly love you Melanctha, and seems like to me Melanctha, you and me had ought to be a little better than we certainly ever are doing now to be together. You certainly do think that way, too, Melanctha to me. But may be you do really love me. Tell me, please, real honest now Melanctha darling, tell me so I really always know it in me, do you really truly love me?'[18] (198)

The rise and fall of the name Melanctha, its marvelous quality as a sensuous pause and organizing sound, are used again and again, as here:

> 'I don't see Melanctha why you should talk like you would kill yourself just because you're blue. I'd never kill myself Melanctha just 'cause I was blue. I'd maybe kill somebody else Melanctha 'cause I was blue, but I'd never kill myself. If I ever killed myself Melanctha it'd be by accident, and if I ever killed myself by accident Melanctha, I'd be awful sorry.' (87)

Nor is *Three Lives* an isolated success.

> Old ones come to be dead. Any one coming to be an old enough one comes to be a dead one. Old ones come to be dead ones. Any one not coming to be a dead one before coming to be an old one comes to be an old one and comes then to be a dead one as any old one comes to be a dead one.[19]

Like most dirges, all this says is that people die. In doing so it sticks closely to its point, more scrupulous in this than most. But it is not death that has the power, it has been deprived. The power is in the word.

> They stayed there and were gay there, not very gay there, just gay there. They were both gay there, they were regularly working there both of them cultivating their voices there, they were both gay there.[20]

Modern criticism has lived like a shrew upon paraphrase and explanation. Literature, it holds, is made of signs and the significance of literature, especially prose, lies in the meaning of these signs. The whole tendency of Gertrude Stein's work is to deny this. She was right to do so. Art is not a form of simple communication. It is this principle, explicit in her work, that, because he has failed to clearly grasp

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[18] *Three Lives* (1909). Quotations are from the New Directions edition.
[19] *The Making of Americans,* Harcourt Brace, New York (1934), p. 419.
[20] "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene," *Geography and Plays,* Four Seas, Boston (1922), p. 17.

and understand it, has perplexed Mr. Reid.[21]

Words have sound and shape. Even the written word wears a halo of unvoiced sound while the spoken word bears the image of its written shape. But sound and shape are accidental properties of words and make up what Aristotle might have called their material cause, for signs are perfectly transparent. They possess only spirit. The logician commonly distinguishes between the physical *token,* which is any actual instance of a word, and the conceptual *type,* which is the idea of the word apart from any particular specimen of it. The distinction removes the temptation to suppose that some one written word, for instance, is that word entirely, so that if the word is erased it ceases to exist in the language. Obviously all that ceases to exist are the marks that make that instance of the word (the token), and not the word itself (the type). Every effort of language to call attention to its indispensable though semantically irrelevant body is treasonous to its function, for the function of the physical is to bear the meaning, not to be the meaning; it is to point beyond itself to the notion it represents, not to grimace and grandstand and walk fearsomely on wire.

So ordinarily language ought to be like the gray inaudible wife who services the great man: an ideal engine, utterly self-effacing, devoted without remainder to its task; but when language is used as an art it is no longer used merely to communicate. It demands to be treated as a thing, inert and voiceless. Properties that it possesses accidentally as a sign it suddenly possesses essentially. Why should it matter that *bush* begins with a *b*? That any word has the sound or shape it has: that it is long or short, formed with the tongue or lips or teeth, uttered from the throat or through the mouth or nose, pronounced with a rising or a falling note, clipped or slurred, spoken slowly, fast; that it is stressed in one way or another, habitually whispered or mumbled or roared, surrounded by questionable gestures or impeccable clothes; that it is associated with other shapes and sounds because it happens to resemble them, or for reasons even more fortuitous; that it was Latin once or came from Greek or is used only by people who stammer at ladies as an exercise in discretion; that any word has or is any of these things, although they may explain the origin of its meaning or the limits of its social use or simply the way, in the language, it is produced, is a fact about the word as fundamentally irrelevant to its purely communicative function as the flavor of food to its nutritional value or the color of a locomotive to its force.

[21] Sutherland discusses this problem with what seems to me a good deal of intelligence, *op. cit.,* p. 83 ff.

In every art two contradictory impulses are in a state of Manichean war: the impulse to communicate and so to treat the medium of communication as a means, and the impulse to make an artifact out of the materials of the medium and so to treat the medium as an end. Calligraphy is an obvious instance. The elaboration that can be accorded the letter *R*, for example, far outruns its meaning, yet it would receive no elaboration at all if it were not a letter. One is tempted, therefore, to see in the elaboration some explication of the meaning of the letter, some search for mystic essence even, while at the same time the elaborations reduce it to a pure design whose interest lies wholly in the movement and harmony of lines in space. A sign will tend to make more and more of its physical nature intrinsic to its function by placing more and more meaning on more and more parts of itself. In this way it becomes iconic and the distinction between the sign and its object is progressively broken down. Instead of reducing the strength of the token as one might expect, this attempt to increase the generality of the sign by scooping its material into its type increases immeasurably the uniqueness of the token until it is a token of nothing but itself, for continuously one is invited to wonder if there are not more properties of the sign that can be given significance, and the sign is searched with the thoroughness of a treasure island. So words become the objects they mean while objects are given qualities proper to their names. This is, of course, the action of magic. Levels of language are destroyed. Logical types are deliberately confused. Ends are telescoped into means. Types are merged with tokens. Signs are identified with things. In a sense, the serious aim of language is ignored and even made fun of. And in so far as the literary arts use signs in this way, it is wholly misleading to describe them as forms of communication. They are devoted, quite as much, to the manufacture of intentionally useless objects. The attraction to the artist of the word made flesh, the love of the word as a resonance or a shape in space, is the least understood of all esthetic phenomena, being perhaps so purely a property of the creative consciousness and the first quality of which the insensitive are usually deprived.

> Trembling was all living, living was all loving, some one was then the other one. Certainly this one was loving this Ada then. And certainly Ada all her living then was happier in living than any one else who ever could, who was, who is, who ever will be living.[22]

[22] "Ada," *Geography and Plays, op. cit.*, p. 16.

In her effort to escape a purely protective language and make a vital thing of words, Gertrude Stein unsettled the whole of prose. Her abstractness enlarged the vocabulary of exciting words and made for some of the dullest, flattest, and longest literature perhaps in history. Her experiments in disassociation enlivened many dead terms and made her a master of juxtaposition.[23] They also created bewildering and unpleasant scatterings of sound. Her success in uniting thought and feeling in the meaning and movement of speech showed that rhythm is half of prose, and gave it the power of poetry without the indecency of imitation. It also nearly made her a mystic and sent her wildly after essences and types. She studied grammar creatively, as few writers have, though little concrete seemed to come of it and she was sometimes made to sound an utter idiot by present tense and Time. She rid her works of anecdote and scene and character and drama and description and narration one by one and in both a theoretical and applied way raised the serious question of their need and function. None of her contemporaries had her intellectual reach, few her persistence and devotion, though many had more industry and insistence on perfection.

In some such way, it seems to me, rather than in the way of Mr. Reid, her measure should be made. But calmly, above all, and slowly. She reads easily when an impatient mind does not hasten the eye. We habitually seek some meaning and we hurry. But each word is an object to Gertrude Stein, something in a list, like the roll-call of the ships, and lists are delightful simply for the words that are on them.

> Winter and wet is on the apple, that means more handkerchief of any color, the size is the same when the pillow is little. That is the way to be conscious. A perfume is not neater.[24] (102)

I think that sometimes she brings prose by its own good methods to the condition of the lyric. And everyone knows some perfectly beautiful lyrics that mean hardly anything.

> Please the spoons, the ones that are silver and have sugar and do not make mischief later, do not ever say more than listening can explain. (102)

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[23] This can be examined best in the latter half of *A Long Gay Book,* in *Tender Buttons,* and on a larger scale in *Ida,* a late surrealistic novel rich in symbolism, a rare thing for Gertrude Stein.

[24] This and the following quotation are from *A Long Gay Book* in *G.M.P. and* Two Shorter Stories. Plain Edition, Paris (1932).

# DELL H. HYMES:

## Reading 'Kora in Hell'

No town so small, but bizarre death of a baby
Wins it a dateline. I trouble as I read.
And Bill Williams, when you wrote, for whatever
Good reason, "The brat died of pneumonia,"

Reading, I had to go stand beside our baby.
Almost a year, the sweetness sleeping there.
Still the world in its randomness hasn't crushed
What it will. Her dying be past mine—

Not for hope of sparing sorrow, not to me—
So her life be brimmed with days and nights of savour,
Her heart accustomed to a bittered sweetness,
So she stands, gazing across my death, clear-eyed.

## Hitch-Hiking, Highway 99

North of Redding,
Rabbit carcasses greased the way.

Out of Weed,
Jarring the brakes, jumping out,
He snatched a rifle and fired—
"Hawk," he said. "I always stop."

Near Klamath Falls,
The attendant hovered above the windshield,
Wiped body juices, bits of wing,
A wafered butterfly.

Portland.
Conventionally loud,
"Thanks, thanks a lot"

For myself and my quiet friend,
A student, a Jain, from Bombay.

# RICHARD EMIL BRAUN:

## Spano

The hill men descend twice a year. Before
the rains a few come to buy tobacco
and after the rains a hundred or so
spend a weekend camping along the shore.
Thick, black, serious people, having no use
for whites or littoral natives, they wait
in camp and watch the ocean palpitate
as their agents auction the year's produce.

In 1872 a German
philosopher was endowed for three years'
research and he came to these mountaineers
to try a language of perfect reason
he had invented, based on harmony;
and he succeeded—without the applause,
however, of the institute, because
his papers were buried with him at sea.

Today it is, I said, here's the cable.
The river is waning now; tomorrow
our steamer leaves. I awaken Spano.
About noon we approach the hill people.
Skirled through reeds on a gourd resonator,
their solemn discourse fretted spine and skull.
This may be scandalous, I hope not dull,
says Spano, assembling his recorder.
He was twice wrong. Respectfully, sedate,
the hill men receive his baroque music
as an elaborate dialectic
all might attend though few discriminate.

# CONSTANCE URDANG:

## Faust in Venice: The Artist and the Legend in 'Death in Venice'

> Every piece of work is in fact a realization—piecemeal if you like, but each complete in itself—of our own nature; they are stones on that harsh road which we must walk to learn of ourselves.
>
> —Mann

> . . . who would taste
> The medicine of immortality,
> And who would "be as God"? And in what way?
>
> —Shapiro

In his introduction to the American edition of the *Stories of Three Decades,* Thomas Mann says, about a group of early stories, that they "wear the impress of much melancholy and ironic reflection on the subject of art and the artist: his isolation and equivocal position in the world of reality, considered socially and metaphysically and as the result of his double bond with nature and spirit." The youthful melancholy may have lessened with the years, but the theme of the place of the artist in the world continued to occupy Mann's attention. All the artist-figures in his works share certain characteristics not shared by the non-artists—although they too, by reason of their very humanity, have the "double bond with nature and spirit."

Perhaps the most important characteristic of Mann's artist is his isolation, whether subjective (as in the case of Tonio Kröger) or objective (like Leverkühn's, expressed in the social isolation that results from his contraction of syphilis, the physical isolation of the house in the country to which he retires, the psychological isolation of his madness). Mann would certainly have agreed that isolation is not the peculiar prerogative of the artist—that it is one of the inescapable concomitants of the human condition. Nevertheless, essentially the artist remains for him the exile, the outsider, the stranger to normal, conventional human activity. The artist can observe life and the world of reality, can interpret it, can even under-

stand it; but he cannot participate in it. If he does, disaster follows (Cipolla is shot for having thus misused his art, von Aschenbach dies of cholera because he has permitted himself to get involved in life, Leverkühn's attempts at human relationships are aborted by the deaths of those he loves).

These artists are all, in this sense, "marked men," whether or not the sign or stigma of their differentness is generally visible (interestingly, it is the artist manqué, the dilettante who shares some —but not all—of the characteristics of the truly creative artist-figure, who is most often physically marked; Herr Friedemann is a hunchback, Klaus Heinrich has a club foot).

Some further characteristics of Mann's artists, as at least one critic has pointed out, are their unusual sensitivity (producing that heightened perception necessary for the production of a work of art), their lack of adaptability (another aspect of the inability to conform to external values), and their general uselessness and incompetence in dealing with practical life (an ineffectuality sometimes even carried over into the sphere of their art: Spinell, in *Tristan,* is ineffectual in his role as artist as well as in his role as man).

Mann always sees the artist in his relation to the bourgeois. Sometimes, as in *Dr. Faustus,* the two are represented by separate characters (Leverkühn, artist; Zeitblom, bourgeois); more often, both aspects are contained within a single character. Tonio Kröger is the son of a respectable German consul father and a fiery, musical Italian mother; even Hans Castorp, in whom the bourgeois element is by far the stronger, had painted some pictures that were not without artistic merit; and von Aschenbach's ancestors "had all been officers, judges, departmental functionaries"—and northerners—except for his maternal grandfather, "a Bohemian musical conductor," and a southerner, for Mann frequently identifies the north with the bourgeois and the south with the artist (Kröger's father, too, was northern, his "artistic" mother southern). It is an awareness of the conflict that results from the presence of these two opposing forces (the one representing the bond with the world of reality, with nature; the other representing the bond with the spirit) within himself that tortures the artist and that has produced him. He both wants and does not want to share in the life that he recognizes as "the world of reality"; he both wants and does not want to rid himself of the sign or stigma of his isolation; but he can no more avoid his destiny than a giraffe can decide to become a horse and proceed to do so.

There is one quality above all that isolates Mann's artists from their fellow-men. It is a truism to apply to the artist the phrase "divine discontent," but perhaps it is as good a phrase as any to describe the impulse that urges him to persist—and the better because it can be used to characterize as well the legendary Faust. For Mann's artist, like the Faust-figure, is driven—by something in himself that he does not understand—to seek knowledge beyond the humanly knowable. More than that; since in his relation to his work the artist is omnipotent, in his role as creator he becomes a true usurper of superhuman powers. For the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that force which drove the symbolic Faust to estrange himself from both man and God would be explained only in terms of a literal pact with the devil. For later writers the devil had become a metaphor, the inferno raged within the mind; but the evil was no less real, and the imagery persisted. Particularly writers of the Romantic school recognized the existence of evil and made it concrete; the forces of darkness are never far from their dark landscapes, filled with gloomy castles, deserted roads, sinister forests, threatening storms, vampires, werewolves, satanic heroes and helpless heroines. Here nighttime, illness and sin form an unholy alliance. The discovery and exploitation of the Unconscious confirmed what these writers already knew. The old metaphors had not been wrong. The devil was real, and was still at work, although the language used to describe him had shifted from that of theology to that of psychiatry.

Several critics have pointed out Mann's indebtedness to the ideas of German Romanticism. They find evidence of this debt in his conception of genius as disease; in one of his persistent prejudices, that illness is more interesting and deeper than health; in his fascination with decadence and death; in his notion of the close relationship between pleasure and pain, between beauty and death; in his emphasis on the connection between the unnatural, unclean, sick, death-bound, sinful and diabolical, and the artist. His use of these ideas, Romantic as it was in essence, was not naive. His purpose, more than anything else, was to show that particularly for the artist it is necessary not only to recognize the existence of evil, but to seek it out and embrace it. To understand this process as one of "succumbing" to the fascination of death and disease (or, if you like, sin), is to misunderstand it; for there is nothing passive about it. The artist-heroes, like Baudelaire and the Decadents, must actively pursue evil. Like Faust, they must invite the devil.

Unlike more mystical writers, Mann does not claim either saint-hood or salvation for these sinners. Their reward, if it is one, is the creation of works of art—and that very creation is at the same time the deepest manifestation of their sin, for the power to create is a prerogative of the divine, and not the human, and they have usurped that power. It is for this reason that, like Faust, Mann's creative artists must be punished. Tonio Kröger must watch life dancing past from behind the glass door; Cipolla must be shot; Aschenbach must die of cholera; Leverkühn must go mad, because each of them has signed his pact with the devil.

While it was not until *Dr. Faustus* (1947) that the devil appeared in his own person in Mann's books, we are told that he planned a Faust book as early as 1901, and hints of the Faustian story may be found again and again in earlier works. *The Magic Mountain,* with its many discussions of evil, its equating of sin with sickness and death, its frequent use of the trappings of mediaeval magic, its Walpurgisnacht—and its eventual ironic salvation of the hero (who, after all, was not an artist), which makes this work a comedy, rather than a tragedy[1]—is one of these. And *The Magic Mountain* was originally conceived as a "comic counterpart" to *Death in Venice.*

At first glance, the two works are entirely dissimilar. One is a novel in many "books"; the other is most often considered a "long short story." The hero of one is a young bourgeois; that of the other, an aging artist. The action of one covers many years; that of the other, a few weeks. One appears to be a novel of ideas, in which the youthful protagonist passes, picaresque-fashion, through a series of intellectual or ideological adventures; the other seems like a study of the disintegration of a man. And yet Mann must have felt that, seminally at least, some underlying theme or idea linked the two works. It may be that the overtones of the Faust legend which appear in *The Magic Mountain* can provide a thread leading to the untangling of that theme.

Since his earliest appearance in the sixteenth century the figure of Faust, representing the darkly questioning mind, the eternally unsatisfied spirit, the incurable thirst for knowledge which drives

[1] Relevant here is Mann's idea of the "Parody," a term he uses to mean the re-telling of a myth or legend from a modern, self-conscious point of view; *Tristan,* a story written in 1902, is the first clear example of this, as the novel *Dr. Faustus* is the last. In this usage, a parody is neither burlesque nor allegory; it is a reworking of the substrata of meaning in the myth in terms of a contemporary story with naturalistic details.

its victims to transgress human limitations, has engaged the thoughts and the imaginations of men. Based on the far older and virtually universal tradition of the magus, the god-priest-king of myth and the ancient world, with the coming of Christianity the central figure of the legend had become a sorcerer whose superhuman aspirations were implemented by the use of magic, the black art, and who, for his forbidden tampering with the forces of darkness, was condemned by orthodoxy to eternal damnation. Magus or magician, he owed his perennial existence to the fact that the problems and dilemmas made concrete in his story are those fundamental moral and philosophical questions which have been presented and represented throughout history: the relationship between man and the powers of good and evil; man's revolt against human limitations; the desire for knowledge beyond mere information; and the disparity between the sublimity and misery of human life.

The Faust-figure has stood for different things to different periods of history. To the viewers of the first Faust dramas and puppet-plays, derived from traditional retellings of the legend, his punishment was a warning against inordinate ambition, speculation about the unknowable, and any kind of league with evil spirits. In Marlowe's tragedy he had become the protagonist of an action which concentrated, intensified, and symbolized the doom brooding over the entire Christian world—for his sin, committed in time, was punished in eternity. For Goethe he became a symbol of the absolute incorruptibility of man, who can spend a lifetime sinning but will not finally be false to the divinity within himself. Essentially, however, Faust, whose sin consists in his "divine discontent"—in wanting knowledge that transcends what can be humanly known—that is, in wanting for himself those qualities and powers reserved for the deity—is a special kind of sinner. He is one who has deliberately chosen evil, fully aware of the price he will have to pay. It was this sinner who caught the imagination and interest of the writers of *Sturm und Drang* and, later, the Romantics. Like Milton's Lucifer, the "sublime criminal" of Schiller's *Räuber,* the satanic heroes of the Gothic romances, and the "fatal men" of Byron, Faust, by reason of his "tragic stain," has taken the desperate, irremediable, fatal false step, and has chosen sin and darkness.

At first glance, Gustave von Aschenbach, the protagonist of *Death in Venice,* would seem to be the antithesis of the Faust-figure and of the artist as Mann usually sees him. He is a successful, middle-

aged man, wealthy enough to own a house in the mountains as well as a town house in Munich, and to travel as he pleases; although his wife is dead, his marriage had been happy, and his married daughter is not a source of anxiety to him; fame had come to him early, and he was admired by both the general public and the connoisseur; although his best work is behind him, he is still "busy with the tasks imposed upon him by his own ego and the European soul," and he wants to live to a good old age. He is consciously a Classicist, an anti-Romantic. His achievement is the product of the "union of dry, conscientious officialdom and ardent, obscure impulse" personified in his parents; his favorite motto is *"Durchhalten!"*; the classic austerity of his style has disciplined every aspect of his life, and he is linked with a series of ascetics: Frederick the Great, Savonarola, St. Sebastian. And that is not all. His rejection of Romanticism, of "bohemianism and all its works," is entirely conscious. As a youth "he had done homage to intellect . . . had turned his back on the 'mysteries' . . ."; as a mature man, he "turned his back on the realm of knowledge." Further, we are told that "The Abject," his most famous story, "rejects the rejected, casts out the outcast. . . . Explicitly he renounces sympathy with the abyss, explicitly he refutes the flabby humanitarianism of the phrase, *'Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner.'"* This series of rejections from which Aschenbach's life and art have sprung would seem to represent the opposite of that acceptance which is generally characteristic of Mann's artists. It is as if we are being presented with an artist who is truly superhuman—who by virtue of discipline and "austerity" and the Classic ideal has succeeded in evading the curse of his destiny, in avoiding the abyss, and in escaping the eternal damnation which is Faust's. But the story is not yet finished.

The first section concerns Aschenbach's walk in Munich, a walk which starts out prosaically enough but finishes with undertones of the dreamlike, the mysterious, the fantastic, even the sinister. He first observes the stone-mason's yard, which forms a "supernumerary and untenanted graveyard opposite the real one," and then his attention is drawn to the figure of a man with a "pilgrim air" who stands on the portico of the mortuary chapel. Thus the stranger's connection with death is obvious from the beginning. He is described in negative terms, as "not Bavarian" (as the painted old man on the steamship is "no youth at all," as the gondolier is of "non-Italian stock," as the street-musician is "scarcely a Venetian

type"); he has that reddish hair associated in the German tradition with sinister figures (the hair of the painted old man is dyed brown, so we do not know its original color; the gondolier has a blond moustache; the street musician has "a great mop of red hair"); he has "long, white, glistening teeth laid bare to the gums" (the gondolier's efforts "bared his white teeth to the gums," the street-musician is described as "showing his strong white teeth in a servile smile"). Aschenbach does not know whether seeing the stranger produces in him the unrest which he immediately feels, but a longing to travel suddenly comes on him like "a seizure, almost a hallucination," and he has a vision of the jungle:

> a landscape, a tropical marshland, beneath a reeking sky, steaming, monstrous, rank—a kind of primeval wilderness-world of islands, morasses, and alluvial channels. Hairy palm-trunks rose near and far out of lush brakes of fern, out of bottoms of crass vegetation, fat, swollen, thick with incredible bloom. There were trees, mis-shapen as a dream, that dropped their naked roots straight through the air into the ground or into water that was stagnant and shadowy and glassy-green, where mammoth milk-white blossoms floated, and strange high-shouldered birds with curious bills stood gazing sidewise without sound or stir. Among the knotted joints of a bamboo thicket the eyes of a crouching tiger gleamed . . .

For an unaccountable reason, this vision inspires in him "a longing inexplicable," and while he is not so irrational as to contemplate a journey to the tigers, he decides almost at once to give up his quiet summer in the mountains and to travel to the south (invariably, for Mann, the source of art). When, safe in the tram, he thinks again of the man on the portico, the stranger has disappeared; "his whereabouts remained a mystery."

This early episode, then, foreshadows much of what is to come. Vernon Venable has interpreted the story as one in which,

> the treble is the simple narrative sequence of Aschenbach's voyage, his life on the Lido, his love for the boy Tadzio, and his death. The ground bass is the "life and death" theme, repeated as a sort of undertone to the story by those characters who seem to have no very obvious connection with the narrative content.[2]

He quite rightly points out that a clue to Mann's technique lies in the dualism or polarity which always characterizes his subject-matter;

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[2] Vernon Venable, "Poetic Reason in Thomas Mann," *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, XIV (Winter 1938), 65.

that the themes of his novels are generally constituted by such large antitheses as life-death, fertility-decay, flesh-spirit; that he "never prefers one term of his antithesis to the other, for his interest is not in arguing theses but in developing themes"; finally, that his irony is so deep-seated that even individual symbols are ambiguous, and the jungle, for example, which represents life at its most lush, is seen also as the breeding-place of the plague. These general statements cannot be denied, but it would seem that in *Death in Venice* the life-death antithesis, which does pervade the story, is used not primarily for its own sake, but as a metaphor in the presentation of the true theme, that of the impossibility, for the artist, of avoiding his destiny, as Faust could not avoid his. The mysterious stranger, then, signifies life (as opposed to the cemetery, the crosses and monuments in the stone-mason's yard, and the mortuary); the vision of the jungle, seen by Aschenbach now as lush, rank fertility, is here opposed to his musings on the mystical meanings of the scriptural texts; Aschenbach's fear and his desire are opposed—three oppositions which do fall roughly into the three realms of physical things, of ideas, and of emotions, as Venable suggests; but there is more to it than that. The stranger, who reappears in various guises throughout the story, is not simply a symbolic human figure who happens to be there and unwittingly acts as a catalyst for Aschenbach's decisions (although, if we choose to take the entire story in its psychological interpretation only, we could say that none of the characters outside of Aschenbach himself has any "real" existence, beyond that which he gives them in his mind—just as we cannot know whether the devil did actually appear to Leverkühn or whether that scene was the product of a mind already diseased). He is the figure of the tempter who can assume any shape he pleases, and if we do not recognize him yet, we need only wait until he appears as the gondolier, an "obstinate, uncanny man," who says, "The signore will pay," and then vanishes before he has received any money; or as the street-musician, that suspicious figure that "seemed to carry with it its own suspicious odor" (carbolic, in terms of the naturalistic detail). The jungle, too, may be seen as standing for more than simply "life" or "death"; although Aschenbach is first drawn toward it as the one and is eventually destroyed by it as the other, at bottom it represents the "mysteries," the forces of darkness, the Romantic abyss which Aschenbach has successfully avoided throughout his life.

The second section of the story concerns Aschenbach's past life and discusses his works; it does not advance the narrative in any way. Here too, however, are disquieting hints of the inevitable ending. The classic austerity, the moral fibre of the man and the artist, which is the surviving principle around which he has built his life and his art after rejecting both knowledge and the "mysteries," is itself called into question:

> And yet: this moral fibre, surviving the hampering and disintegrating effect of knowledge, does it not result in its turn in a dangerous simplification, in a tendency to equate the world and the human soul, and thus to strengthen the hold of the evil, the forbidden, and the ethically impossible? Is it not moral and immoral at once . . . ?

In this section we learn that we know more about Aschenbach than he himself does. As he sees himself, by denying the existence of evil, renouncing sympathy with the abyss, he has escaped the destiny of the artist. But what he has attempted to deny, in refusing to acknowledge his guilt and attempting to escape the punishment of Faust, is his own humanity. "Development is destiny," Mann tells us, and there is no escaping it.

In the third section we travel with Aschenbach to Venice. He is going to meet his fate, but he does not go directly. First he tries an island in the Adriatic: "A blunder." Even after he has arrived on the Lido reality becomes dreamlike and distorted: "this rightabout-of his luggage sends him back, as if accidentally. But as soon as he sets foot on the steamer that is to take him to Venice, "reality" begins to fade—as it did when he first saw the mysterious stranger. The sailor who escorts him belowdecks is hunchbacked; the ticket-seller has "a beard like a goat's," he gives Aschenbach an "odd impression," he looks like a circus-director, is glib like a croupier, his bow is melodramatic. On the deck Aschenbach encounters the old fop from Pola, a caricature of what he himself is to become.

> He felt . . . as though the world were suffering a dreamlike distortion of perspective. . . . Strange figures passed and repassed—the elderly coxcomb, the goat-bearded man . . . there came over him a dazed sense, as though things about him were just slightly losing their ordinary perspective, beginning to show a distortion that might merge into the grotesque.

The sight of Venice at first dispels his morbid feelings, but it is followed immediately by the episode with the gondolier, a figure Aschen-

bach recognizes as somehow uncanny and threatening. "The signore will pay," says this sinister figure, and in his own mind Aschenbach identifies him with Charon, after a passage in which the Venetian gondola is compared to the black coffin and the bier.

The next significant episode is his first sight of the boy Tadzio, here already seen in terms of Greek sculpture, of Phaeax and Eros, accompanied by his sisters with their vacant, nunlike expressions and dresses of cloisterlike plainness. Aschenbach is at once conscious of his own grey hair, and makes the Romantic connection between beauty and death (which has already been foreshadowed by the description of Venice, followed by the gondola incident):

> "He is delicate, he is sickly," Aschenbach thought. "He will most likely not live to grow old." He did not try to account for the pleasure the idea gave him.

The final episode in this section is Aschenbach's abortive departure from a Venice which has somehow become a challenge to him.

> The hardest part . . . was the thought that he should never more see Venice again . . . he must henceforth regard it as a forbidden spot, to be forever shunned; senseless to try it again, after he had proved himself unfit.

The city has become a forbidden spot, not, he recognizes, because of anything intrinsic to itself, but because of some failure on his own part. But of course he does not leave. Again on his return to the Lido reality becomes dreamlike and distorted: "this rightabout-face of destiny—incredible, humiliating, whimsical as any dream!" By the end of the episode he has come to a partial realization of his true motives in returning:

> he . . . sat hiding the panic and thrills of a truant schoolboy beneath a mask of forced resignation. . . . He felt rejoiced to be back, yet displeased with his vacillating moods, his ignorance of his real desires.

When he sees Tadzio again, "the casual greeting died away before it reached his lips, slain by the truth in his heart," and he makes a "gesture of welcome, a calm and deliberate acceptance of what might come."

In the fourth section, as in the second, little "happens" in a narrative, or dramatic, sense. Aschenbach sees Tadzio daily. Athens, Socrates, Phaedrus are key names. All the imagery is expressed in terms of Classic myth; but the cold clarity of the disciplined, austerely

Classical—which Aschenbach has always opposed to the mysteries of the Romantic abyss—has become distorted. The clean, sharp outlines are blurred by a sensual, even a specifically sexual, grossness, and it is this very distortion which now draws Aschenbach. The sun is a naked god with cheeks aflame. There are references to Elysium; Oceanus; Achelous and the nymphs; Semele and Zeus; Eros; the Trojan shepherd borne aloft by an eagle; Eos; "the goddess, ravisher of youth, who stole away Cleitos and Cephalos and, defying all the envious Olympians, tasted beautiful Orion's love"; Poseidon's horses; Hyacinthus, doomed to die because two gods were rivals for his love; Zephyr; Narcissus—in the grip of his hopeless passion Aschenbach sees "a world possessed, peopled by Pan." It is a world soon to be possessed by panic.

The fifth, and longest, and last section deals with the coming of the plague to Venice, and with Aschenbach's final recognition of the relation between the cholera—with the vice and lawlessness that accompany it—and his own illicit passion; with his further recognition of the relation between beauty and death, here virtually identified; and with his perception of the connection between art and the abyss—with his final understanding of the nature of his guilt—of the Faustian role of the artist—and of his own destiny. It embodies a rejection, on Mann's part, of the Classic view of the artist, and an acceptance of the Romantic view.

The section opens with Aschenbach's earliest intimation of something gone wrong in the life of the Lido. The hotel barber is the first to mention "the sickness" to him and that afternoon, on his trip into Venice (now become an infernal region), he notices the "sweetish, medicinal smell, associated with wounds and disease," and makes the further connection between disease and the sinful, or diabolical:

> Passion is like crime . . . it welcomes every blow dealt the bourgeois structure, every weakening of the social fabric. . . . These things that were going on in the unclean alleys of Venice . . . gave Aschenbach a dark satisfaction. The city's evil secret mingled with the one in the depths of his heart . . .

Next come the street-musicians, among whom reappears the sinister stranger, not a Venetian, with his mop of red hair, his suspicious odor, his mocking laugh. But Aschenbach, drinking pomegranate juice (another reminder of the dreamlike, the unreal, the subterranean) on the hotel terrace, cannot elicit a direct statement from

the man on the subject that is troubling him. It is not until the next day that the British travel agent enlightens him, describing the source of the cholera in virtually the same words that were used to describe Aschenbach's vision of the jungle, showing that he had travelled farther than he had intended in response to the "pilgrim air" of the now nearly-forgotten stranger in Munich:

> Its source was the hot, moist swamps of the delta of the Ganges, where it bred in the mephitic air of that primeval island-jungle, among whose bamboo thickets the tiger crouches, where life of every sort flourishes in rankest abundance . . .

Aschenbach knows that he should leave, but he is kept in Venice by the deeper knowledge that the guilty secret of the city is less frightful than his own.

> His art, his moral sense, what were they in the balance beside the boons that chaos might confer?

That night he has a real Walpurgisnacht of a dream. "The beginning was fear; fear and desire, with a shuddering curiosity . . ." at the end, "in his very soul he tasted the bestial degradation of his fall." When he awakes, panic is in the air. But in the city of death and fear Tadzio, the beautiful beloved, remains, and Aschenbach

> would follow him through the city's narrow streets where horrid death stalked too, and at such times it seemed to him as though the moral law were fallen in ruins and only the most monstrous and perverse held out a hope . . .

. . . strange thoughts for a man thought of by his contemporaries as the conqueror of decadence; but by this time he has become its victim.

There is not much more he must do to demonstrate his complete surrender to the forces of darkness that now surround him, made visible in the ravages of the cholera, in the increase on the streets of Venice of intemperance, indecency, and crime. His disgust at the contrast between his own aging body and grey hair, and the ideal youthful beauty he sees in the boy Tadzio blinds him to the perversity of the impulse that leads him to dye his hair and paint his face in hideous emulation of the young-old man he had encountered on the steamer. He gets lost in the maze of streets, and sinks down, already stricken, although he does not realize it, with the preliminary symptoms of the cholera, on the steps of a well:

> There he sat, the master . . . who had . . . in a style of classic purity renounced bohemianism and all its works, all sympathy with the abyss and the troubled depths of the outcast human soul . . .

The irony is obvious. But it is an irony deeper than at first appears, for this is not merely a depiction of the personal degradation and downfall of an individual artist. It is the picture of Faust on the midnight of his last day, with nothing to do but wait until the devil comes to claim him for eternal damnation; it is the picture of the artist-figure who recurs again and again in Mann's work, here seen at the point at which he must pay his debt to the dark forces through which his art came into being. Now that the end is in sight, Aschenbach realizes what Mann has known all along:

> What good can the artist be as a teacher, when from his birth up he is headed direct for the pit? For knowledge . . . is all-knowing, understanding, forgiving; it takes up no position, sets no store by form. It has compassion with the abyss—it *is* the abyss . . .

He realizes that he has not escaped, that he cannot escape the artist's destiny—which is that of the damned Faust. Beauty, simplicity, detachment, form—all the virtues of art—lead to the bottomless pit:

> Yes, they lead us thither, I say, us who are poets—who by our nature are prone not to excellence but to excess.

The final paragraph of the story is devoted to his death, and here the final Romantic equation is made, for death itself appears to him as the "pale and lovely summoner," in the image of his beautiful beloved.

What is Mann "saying," then, in *Death in Venice?* What is it all "about"? More than anything else, it is about the nature and destiny of the artist. As Henry Hatfield has noted,

> The novella is . . . an expression of a gnawing anxiety about the cost in human terms, of playing the role of the "hero of creative work."[3]

Told in Romantic terms, in terms of the life-death antithesis and the Romantic beauty-death synthesis, it is a demonstration of the thesis that

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[3] Henry Hatfield, *Thomas Mann,* p. 61.

> true art can come only from a perception of all sides of life, and that the sick, the unclean, the unnatural, death itself, must be studied and understood.

More than that, it shows that, for the artist, cursed as Faust was cursed, by his artist-nature, it is necessary actively to seek out and embrace evil; and that there is no escape from the inevitable punishment which must follow on his guilt. That guilt consists, essentially, not in committing any particular sin, but in being an artist, a creator, in reaching out beyond the humanly knowable and taking on himself the burden of superhuman power. This is the Romantic view of the artist as creator, rather than imitator. It is Faust's guilt. Throughout his long and successful life Aschenbach thought he had avoided that destiny, only to find at the end that it cannot be avoided. He renounced knowledge, bohemianism, "the abyss," in favor of discipline, classicism, and austerity—only to find that these are nothing more than the other side of the same coin. By choosing to be an artist he had sealed his pact with the devil, and now at the end of his life, after a period of more than twenty-four years' creativeness, the devil has collected his price.

The story is far from a literal transposition—a parody, in Mann's sense—of the Faust legend, as *Dr. Faustus* frankly is. In terms of time, it deals only with the culminating moment of the Faust legend. Aside from the dream Walpurgisnacht there is no overt reference to the legend's narrative; it is all implied. But many other less overt references to the Faust story remain: the mysterious stranger, always "uncanny," "suspicious," described in such a way as to relate him to the sinister supernatural figures of German tradition; the excursion through the streets of Venice (or the kingdom of Hell), when it seemed "the moral law were fallen in ruins and only the most monstrous and perverse held out a hope"—as would be true of Hell; even the details of Aschenbach's early career create some kind of parallel to Faust's researches into all branches of knowledge. Aschenbach's opportunities to get away from Venice—the first when he actually decides to leave, and is brought back by the "accidental" misdirection of his luggage, the second when the British travel agent urges him to leave and he consciously decides to remain—echo the damned Faust's belief in his inevitable damnation and his refusal to listen to the voices that speak to him of grace.

In view of the fact that Mann had planned a Faust book as early

as 1901; that *Death in Venice* (1911) was followed by *The Magic Mountain,* with its Faustian echoes, originally conceived as a "comic counterpart" to it; that he did, so many years later, write *Dr. Faustus;* and that he tended to return again and again to ideas that appealed to him, it does not seem far-fetched to see in *Death in Venice* an initial statement of the Faust theme, particularly since every artist who apears in Mann's works seems to be related in some way to the Faust-figure. Without implying that this was always a conscious relation on Mann's part of the artist to an historical literary legend, one could say that for him the Faust stories held meanings valid generally for our time, and specifically for Mann himself, and that throughout his career as a writer he continued to feel out these meanings. As Mann himself said,

> Every piece of work is in fact a realization—piecemeal if you like, but each complete in itself—of our own nature; they are stones on that harsh road which we must walk to learn of ourselves.

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## GEORGE P. ELLIOTT:

## The Poetry of Stanley Kunitz

STANLEY KUNITZ: *Selected Poems 1928-1958.* Atlantic-Little, Brown and Co.

*Selected Poems 1928-1958* includes 26 poems from Stanley Kunitz's first book, *Intellectual Things* (1930), 26 from his second, *Passport to the War* (1944), and 33 collected from magazines or previously unpublished. Many of those reprinted are now revised, always (in my judgment) for the better, and none of those omitted from his first collection are of the best.

My experience with this poet has been like my experience with a good many others: for a long time I knew he was there and every so often I would cock an ear in his direction without catching his voice; and then, I'm not sure how, suddenly I am able to hear him. Such a change of mind is a joy, but it

is sometimes also a sorrow (especially to an anthologist, as I can testify). I hope that others who have not yet caught Mr. Kunitz's voice may find this book, as I have done, a revelation.

It is not that his collection adds up to a mysterious entity larger than the sum of its poems. Whitman, for example, strikes me as a poet with a more considerable voice than any poem or group of poems would seem to warrant; I do not mean this as praise, though many people seem to think that his state of things demonstrates that the poet has a great soul; to me it demonstrates that he has not done his job as well as he should have. Nor is Mr. Kunitz's collection one which cries out for excerpting. Rather, it contains poems all of which are worth reading and several of which are first-rate; but I found that I read those several far better after I had read the whole book. Once I had really heard the single voice which speaks these poems, then I could appreciate how good the good ones are.

This is poetry of first-person meditation; even in those poems in which the *I* is not declared, one is aware that this is the voice of a man thinking aloud. The surface of the verse is smooth; the rhythms are quite regular, there are no impossible sound combinations, the syntax is not strained. The diction lacks eccentricity; no words or expressions jar upon the ear, nor is the vocabulary poetical. The subjects are serious, and the poet is serious, even when humorous, in his attitude towards his subjects. Furthermore, in every phrase and rhythm you hear the accent of a man who is being as honest to his own experience and thought as it is possible for him to be; he is never facetious, he never displays himself and his aptitudes, he never lies.

CARELESS LOVE

Who have been lonely once
Are comforted by their guns.
Affectionately they speak
To the dark beauty, whose cheek
Beside their own cheek glows.
They are calmed by such repose,
Such power held in hand;
Their young bones understand
The shudder in that frame.
Without nation, without name,
They give the load of love,
And it's returned, to prove
How much the husband heart
Can hold of it: for what
This nymphomaniac enjoys
Inexhaustibly is boys.

Everyone knows that guns should be phallic symbols. But here is a poet who actually looked at young men cuddling the stocks of their rifles to their cheeks. The gun-woman metaphor is sufficiently submerged so that when that unpleasing polysyllable occurs in the next to last line, *nymphomaniac,* the effect is explosive. And that most of the syllables of the last line should be swallowed up by *inexhaustibly* is fitting; its five syllables balance the five of *nymphomaniac;*

it helps make *boys* puny and alone—*boys,* the noun to which the opening *who* refers. And the affection which the boys give the guns, and which the guns half-return, is shockingly chilled by the frigid, false, inexhaustible love of nymphomania. A technical tour de force, were the subject not important and the poet's attitude toward it not serious; as it is, this technical mastery serves entirely the end of the poem.

Everywhere you turn you are surprised.

> The colors of the world are permanent
> Despite the bleach of change. Pure stain on stain,
> The bow of light's eternal forms is bent
> Across the steep heaven in the general brain. *(Last Words)*

I am not prepared to paraphrase "in the general brain," either in this quatrain or in the whole poem of four quatrains; yet I am prepared to defend its use, because it astonishes and gratifies at once.

> The light that seeks her out
> Finds answering light within,
> And the two join hands and dance
> On either side of her skin. *(When the Light Falls)*

That quatrain passes my private razor test: the simplicity of the rhythm and diction and the preposterousness of the image work together to make an essentially small idea lively and durable, and the more I think about that last word, *skin,* the more I think that it is the burr by which this stanza caught in my mind and clings there yet.

But it is a matter of importance that the surprises of these poems are never achieved by violating the external forms of the verses. Mr. Kunitz sometimes permits himself to alternate rhyme with assonance or consonance but he does not abandon or commence rhyme in mid-poem. He preserves scrupulously and intensely the unity of foot, of line, of couplet, of stanza. Granted the colossal pressure within his poems, pressure of feeling, idea, figure, imagery, symbolism, he had to set himself rigid forms and keep them; otherwise, his energy would have diffused with melancholy loss, as for example Blake's did in *Milton,* all 49 expansive parts of which are not worth any one of the four opening quatrains.

These are poems of tension—tension of suffering, of dread, of desire, of appeal; tension of sense against nonsense, of symbol against meaning; tension occasionally of syntax against meter and stanza. Again and again, the reader is disturbed and surprised by the sequence of ideas or images, a sequence by no means logical but leading toward confusion, and then is gratified and set in order by a superb ending.

AMONG THE GODS

> Within the grated dungeon of the eye
> The old gods, shaggy with gray lichen, sit
> Like fragments of the antique masonry
> Of heaven, a patient thunder in their stare.

Huge blocks of language, all my quarried love,
They justify, and not in random poems,
But shapes of things interior to Time,
Hewn out of chaos when the Pure was plain.

Sister, my bride, who were both cloud and bird
When Zeus came down in a shower of sexual gold,
Listen! we make a world! I hear the sound
Of Matter pouring through eternal forms.

I am not entirely clear about those gods, I am not sure how the blocks of language and the quarried love can be in apposition, I don't at all understand how those gods justify the language of love. Yet I like the image of the gods without qualification, and though I do not understand *how* they justify I believe that they do it. And then suddenly the poet's voice changes: from meditative statement to exclamatory address. Where does that sister come from? Who is she that she is also "my bride"? How do "we make a world"? And then, to hear matter pouring through eternal forms—what a shift! what an astonishing idea! what an impossible image! How did the poet ever get there from the gods via the quarry via his sister-bride? I shall never know, as I shall never know how Yeats got to that perfect, impenetrable phrase, "the artifice of eternity." Yet I shall always be grateful that he made it.

A good many poets whose vision is mystical become, when they are not at their best, silly and flatulent and allow their verse to become doggerel or bad rhetoric. Mr. Kunitz never permits such excesses. Perhaps if he had somewhat less self-restraint, a less scrupulous critical taste, he would have produced far more poetry, most of it bad, no doubt, but some of it good, more than he has here provided. As it is, when his energies are not at their fullest, his poems tend to be hermetically symbolic (there are a great many bones in these poems, few of them the kind that hold you up), over-literary in reference, painfully involved, confused without achieving an ordering clarity or release at the end, or partial, as though they were fragments of a continuing meditation. Even these less-than-best poems contain small excellences, a stanza, an image, a figure, an idea. It seems to me that the second and third lines of this poem justify including the whole.

HOW LONG IS THE NIGHT?

On the anvil of love my flesh has been hammered out.
Indifferent, in the indifferent air,
I circulate and suck the star-space in.
No one is dear to me now,
Leastly myself that sickened in the night.
I would abandon this loose bag of bones
And walk between the world's great wounds, unpitying.

Blake said: "I cannot think that Real Poets have any competition. None are greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven; it is so in Poetry." I think that Stanley Kunitz has entered the kingdom of real poetry with seven poems: *Among the Gods, Night-Piece, She Wept She Railed, Open the Gates, For the Word Is Flesh, Organic Bloom,* and *Careless Love*: perhaps with eight or nine more as well. And he hasn't finished yet, praise be.

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